

**Earth Day (April 22, 2018)**

## **Vedas: Reconnecting with Mother Earth in Reverence for Life**



**By Acharya Bramdeo**

**Why Earth day?** Earth day serves to (i) remind us that the Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance; (ii) recognize a collective responsibility to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity (1992 Rio Declaration); (iii) increase awareness about the importance of their planet on the need to maintain the natural assets of the earth in order that life continues on the earth.

**STEM:** Present-day Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics are no longer ample tools to environmentalists, climatologists, meteorologists, geologists and other scientists to address the increased frequency, unpredictable pattern and cataclysmic impact of droughts, floods, cloud bursts, cyclones, landslides, hailstorms, earthquakes, forest fires, epidemics, cold waves and heat waves, etc.

**Karma Theory.** This concept is becoming more and more common in public discourses; a not so strange word: Kaliyuga or the age of a gradual process of physical, behavioural, moral and spiritual decrepitude. The law “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction” is proven false here. In fact the Karma theory states that “Every action has an equal and matching reaction”.

**The trap of excessive consumption.** Humans, as the most intelligent specie of the Creation is trapped in the mad rush of consumerism. Each individual is only trying to surpass his neighbour; the humane aspect of life has been gradually eroding; we have been acting negligently, failing to take due care of the planet that gave us life, and using its resources very ruthlessly.

**April 22, 1970: First commemoration of Earth Day.** In spite of the various conferences, sensitisation campaigns, Climate Change and the ensuing unstable environment has further accentuated the ecological imbalance. Worse, the modern world is continuously inflating the already huge bubble of confusion, excessive materialism, unethical destruction of natural habitats, societal deterioration, fanaticism, distrust, corruption, and self-centredness (Me, Mine & Myself). *All things being equal, the already exhausted Earth has been, is and will always be a scapegoat in the Man versus Nature battle of supremacy.*

**The loop of Interdependence & interconnectedness.** In 1971 Barry Commoner, a leading scientist-activist and environmentalist wrote his four laws of ecology in *The Closing Circle*:  
(1) Everything is connected to everything else. There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all. (2) Everything must go somewhere. There is no "waste" in nature and

there is no "away" to which things can be thrown. (3) Nature knows best. Humankind has fashioned technology to improve upon nature, but such change in a natural system is "likely to be detrimental to that system". (4) There is no such thing as a free lunch. Exploitation of nature will inevitably involve the conversion of resources from useful to useless forms."

**Pollution** is poisoning our thoughts and emotions, air, land and water, endangering life on earth! The moral decline (antisocial behaviours; rising individualism; inability to detect emotions regulating destructive behaviour; thrusting aside social and personal living values, gives way to excessive or impulsive self-indulgence) is indeed a fright. Moral decline goes hand in hand with the deterioration of our biosphere.

**Nature has been taken for granted and its hitting back is indeed very hard.** Yet, humans have not learnt the lessons, pursuing the merciless activities: fields ...drugged to produce more food; animals ...force-fed to satiate the human palate; plastic and non-degradable products ...rising higher than hills; water, air and land pollution ...choking life; Mother Earth ...withered. Elephants, tigers are coming to inhabitable regions because humans have invaded their habitat. Land is continuously being reclaimed from the sea and the rising sea levels are reclamations of land by the sea.

**Science alone is not enough to solve this crisis.** Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle as well as Replenish and Restore Responsible human behaviour is the only way to pay Respect to our planet, Mother Earth. And, *humans must reconnect with Mother Earth in reverence for life.*

**Experts on the lookout for holistic solutions.** Research scholars of pure, applied, physical, social and other sciences are on the lookout for an all-inclusive insight on holistic solutions - cosmological, evolutionary, anthropological, sociological, psychological solutions; they are delving into the sensitivity of people towards their spiritual and religious beliefs, re-reading the beliefs and practices from the ecological perspective to revisit and revive their respective world-views. And strong spiritual and religious feelings tend to re-gear people to *aparigraha*, i.e. refrain from excessive consumption of things. That would halt to a large extent the ruthless exploitation of the resources and the greenhouse effects, and thus help to mitigate the catastrophic impacts of global warming.

**Need to connect to our surroundings.** The world population needs to toe the line of our ancestors and live a life related to things around them, deeply anchored in living values and beliefs caring for the self, the family, society and more importantly about 'mother nature' and the Divine. Every human being need to take cognisance of today's crisis as a universal concern and disseminate the right knowledge. Awareness and accountability is required from all.

**Prithivee Sukta of the Atharvaveda: an entire hymn dedicated to Mother Earth.**

The Vedas and allied texts (Upanishads, Manusmriti, Arthshastra...) all refer to the gross elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth), planets, creatures, directions, trees, plants, rivers and seas as vital in maintaining the ecological balance of Mother Earth. On May12, 2017, at the release of the book of N.C. Joshi, Secretary of the Rajya Sabha 'Atharva Veda-Prithvi Sukta' the former Vice-President of India, Mr. Hamid Ansari referred to that sukta in explicit terms:

*"Understanding the treasures of planet earth and the means to exploit and utilise them in a sustainable manner has been central to human civilization. Our earth system with its complex inter-*

*linkages between the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere and the ecosphere provides us with water and land resources, ecological, water and energy resources... It indeed contains essential principles of life, environmental sustainability, peaceful coexistence and resultant multicultural approaches.”*

**Local, national & international efforts.** The multilevel efforts of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the numerous conferences on environment and sustainable development, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Earth Charter Initiative, the Forum on Religion and Ecology, the worldwide NGOs, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, and the various spiritual and religious teachers and/or preachers, movements, declarations have qualified the problem of Mother earth as an urgent ‘cultural issue’ from a comprehensive ethical standpoint; a new discovery ...*Philosophies and communities have holistic approach where human life is eternally connected to Mother Earth.*

**The wake-up call:** The Human race has to:

- » Put a full stop to its stance as an indifferent, silent and negligent strange observer and adopt responsible attitudes as regards to resource utilization and conservation strategies.
- » Stop and cause to stop the self-seeker’s approach where no other species matters except ourselves; once we cross the line to kill off other species, next would be ...people!
- » Share a symbiotic relationship by connecting to the surroundings and maintain a “sustainable development” formula, infused in the rituals of daily life.
- » Rope in more and more people to disseminate true knowledge about Mother Earth and her powerful message in the language of fires, floods, storms, and droughts.
- » Take climate science beyond the laboratories and tune with the tangible experiences of place, identity, and culture, connecting past and present experiences in planning the future.
- » Rediscover the sanctity of Mother Earth sacredness by recoding the legacy through narratives (face to face story-telling to children, cultural representations) as an effective and efficient tool) for enhanced ecological awareness.
- » Re-allocate due importance to spirituality, living values and religion which have been pushed to the back seat in the wake of scientific and technological development.

**Vedic philosophy, logical beliefs & practices.** The Arya Samaj, as a reform movement, advocate orthopraxy, correct belief and correct practice of the Vedic philosophy; Ethical conduct, both in day-to-day life, and rituals and worship; Devotion as unwavering obeisance to the spiritual and religious teachings, and the laws of nature (the Creation); The law of Karma where we shall reap the consequences of our actions in an equal and like manner, rewards for positive actions and penalties for negative actions; Encourages capacity building to understand and propagate the physical sciences embedded in the hymns of the Vedas and develop a synergy between science and spirituality to transform the ‘social animal’ into ‘social/human beings’; A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment.

**Responsible behaviour towards Mother Earth.** Given the Vedas were and acknowledged as the Revelation to mankind at Creation, the Vedic society was therefore the first Earth & Environmental Protection Agency in the history of mankind. Various verses in the Vedas promote environmental friendliness, and emphasise on our duty to respect nature and all natural resources - a first and firm

message to mankind to take due care of Mother Earth. The Prithivee Sukta of the AtharvaVeda elaborates on practices upholding protection of the environmental. Humans need to:

- » Care for Mother Earth as a grown up cares for his mother {*maataa bhumih putro aham prithivyaa*};
- » Be ethical towards the motherland who has given us a place to live, sustains our life by providing us with the necessities (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) as well as the means to increase our levels of happiness up and even attain eternal bliss or salvation {*saa no bhumirbhuridhaara payo duhaamatho akshatu varchasaa*};
- » Understand the cycle of seasons, crops, and the judicious use of resources (*grishmaste bhume varshaani sharadhamantah shishiro vasantah...*);
- » Perform Yajna in towns and villages as a scientific environmental cleansing process (fumigation through evaporation and sublimation) to improve the quality of our air, water and land, as well as in fields as part and parcel of organic farming {*prithivyaamurdhvaah shuraa aahutyaah purastaat*};
- » Live and let live other species to ensure a sustainable ecological balance and long term happiness for all {*shaantivaa surabhih...prithivee payaa saha*};
- » Stand firm walking along the path of Dharma (righteous living) just as Mother Earth is in its routine (revolution on its axis, rotation around the sun ...etc.) {*sa no bhumih poorvepeye dadhatu*};
- » Know planet Earth and the universe as the university of life ( *jyotiramritam martebyhya udyantsuryo rashmibhiraatanoti* );
- » Teach children to be respectful towards planet Earth, legate it to coming generations;
- » Recognise the essence of a strong leadership from learned men for a spiritual and strong commitment to act dutifully {*prajaapatih prithivee vishva garbhaa mashaamaashaam ranyo nah krinotu*};

**Earth as the Foster Mother.** It is still considered very good to live in forest where one can experience environment in its purest form. Modern day retreats are in the forests, on hills and mountains as emerging eco-tourism destinations.

All these developments need thoughtful consideration as human survival is possible only with the conservation of entire flora and fauna and the synchronization of lifestyle with nature and the five elements (space, air, water, fire & earth), including plants and animals.

Mother earth will be peaceful for us only when we would be ethical towards her {*prithivee shaantih*}.

*Bibliography:* RigVeda 2.12.13; 2.41.20; 10.35.3; 10.46.9; 10.66.9; 10.189.01 & 03  
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